

## 14. BAYAS AND FIREFLIES

I was interested to read in the *Journal* of December 1953, the letter 'Bayas and Fireflies' by Mr. R. M. Aldworth.

I was hitherto under the impression that the story of weaver birds using fireflies to illuminate their nests was a purely local one for this part of the country, but it seems that it is a fairly widespread one. It was not long after I arrived here that an Estate writer told me the story. I was sceptical from the start, and it was some time before I was able to get to the bottom of the mystery for myself. On several occasions I have inspected nests and in most cases have found insects roughly pushed head first into the mud or clay at the side of the nest chamber. I have never seen a live insect imprisoned and not all were fireflies by any means. I have come to the conclusion that the insects are placed there for no other reason than as a store of food against hard times; this, I think, is the only logical reason for such a habit.

KUMBAZHA ESTATE,  
PATHANAMTHITTA P.O., & T.O.,  
TRAVANCORE, S. INDIA,  
April 18, 1954.

P. G. S. HALL

[It would appear from the above that Mr. Hall has *commonly* found insects stuck in the mud within Baya nests. Most observers have recorded this as a very exceptional occurrence only, and probably accidental. However, the explanation is unconvincing. It is difficult to believe that the quantity 'stored' can be sufficient for a meal, or that a Baya would ever be so hard put to it for food to fall back on desiccated remains of insects!—Eds.]

15. MORE NOTES ON FINN'S BAYA (*PLOCEUS*  
*MEGARHYNCHUS*)

After the recent publication of my note on Finn's Baya *Ploceus megarhynchus* (*JBNHS*, 51: 200-204) I had occasion to visit the bird market in Calcutta, where I found a large Baya, apparently of this species, being sold in some numbers. I bought a few birds in the hope of being able to study their plumages, but they did not survive very long. The five additional skins now available in Bombay, however, if compared with the specimens listed earlier produce interesting results:

Four of the 11 birds dealt with in my previous paper, viz., Nos. 6, 7, 8 & 9, were cage birds and not procured directly from their natural habitat. If these four, together with the fresh specimens from the Calcutta market are compared with the others (excluding those in complete non-breeding plumage) they fall into two distinct groups:—

Group I. The 'cage' birds, have:

- (a) yellow on the rump and upper tail coverts;
- (b) the yellow on the underparts extending to and including the vent and under tail coverts;